

Planning HR for the Future

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Abstract:

Top trends for academic libraries have been published for years and usually will have a strong focus on technology or trends in collection development and related activities. Sometimes the impact on human resource hiring practices or how these trends change organizational structure are addressed but not holistically or not in the HR jargon of "talent". Planning HR activities in the future will require a strategic point of view for recruiting and hiring the talent needed for organizational growth.

Talent can be defined as the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform tasks and functions that advance an organization from that position's responsibility or need within the larger group. The management of that talent can be described as the procedures or processes that are used to recruit, assess, deploy, and retain that talent, as well as making changes as needed as trends and conditions warrant. Thus, with the identification of emerging trends within the profession, there should also be an identification of the human resource impact these trends will create.

At this writing, COVID is still strong and modifying the services and functions that libraries perform. As a trend, this also impacts librarians and staff in the performance of their duties and is predicted to have long term changes to the way this profession functions and serves stakeholders.

Keywords: academic libraries | COVID-19 | organizational planning | HR

Article:

Introduction

Within the human resources profession, private companies are already preparing for a post-COVID market as they would any change to the labor market in general. They promote products that help companies make strategic changes to recruiting and training in order to meet the needs created by the change in the market. Depending on the profession, these companies look at supply and demand of talent and help align talent needs with candidates in the workplace.

Changes in labor market economics will require these changes to be strategic, especially with regard to recruitment, citing new skills or working personas needed as factors have changed both economically and societally.

Evolving talent needs

Librarianship has been changing and evolving for years as technology has changed what we do, but also as users have changed what they need. The user market sometimes has new technologies before the libraries, which means librarians may or may not have access or training to technology questions that come up. In academic libraries, the level of information questions has risen from simple reference questions (that can be Googled) to more complex data or subject specific questions that require a deeper dive or expert in providing appropriate resources and materials.

New applications and the need for professional knowledge can create complex issues related to finances, ethics or talent needed to traverse the information landscape. Specialty needs have developed in areas related to systems, digitization and curation, repository development, clinical needs, and research data management. These are all technology- driven and have evolved beyond the traditional positions most librarians were educated for. Even teaching and information literacy positions have stepped up expectations needed for today's technology rich society. This aligns with Cal Newport's view of *Deep Work*. His book addresses the value of deep work in today's pre-COVID economy by identifying two successful talent attributes: the ability to master hard things and the ability to produce at an elite level. Librarians have been evolving into these abilities for years, pushed by technology and related trends.

This creates a trend of hiring talent that can meet these needs for the sake of the organization so that librarians and libraries remain relevant to the larger organization needs. This form of change management is called out by ACRL in their 2020 top trends in academic libraries. "Changes in skills" is one of three categories of urgent changes needed to be successful in a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex and full of ambiguity, the review committee goes on to say. Most of the other trends listed related to enhancements or upgrades to technology related services and activities.

A good example of this change or transition into different or a more enhanced need for skills or talent can be seen through a model created at the University of Central Florida (UCF) Libraries that moved subject librarians from a beginning/basic status to an evolved engaged status. The motivation for this change was from the ARL Spec Kit 349 and the need to have a higher level of sustained, high-quality interactions with academic programs and departments. This represents an internal model of talent recognition and how incumbent librarians can be developed into having the skills needed.

New Skills or abilities needed

The future of work will be forever changed with the impact of COVID. It not only stretched our abilities but also proved that the workplace itself can be adapted (think remote work), with the understanding that workers can adapt to those conditions. With most teaching going remote, libraries had to make the same jump to virtual activities such as online library instruction, the use of chat or video conferencing for reference or consultations, and new ways to communicate to patrons about other services or expectations.

Sounds easy, but those skills are not inherent with everyone so many librarians and staff had learning curves to adapt successfully. The needed talent did not always align with the needed

work so professional development opportunities were engaged to help align those skills. Going forward might be a different situation as we have proven work can be done differently.

Alex Sixt looked at the trends that are shaping the future of work in a post-COVID world, all of which could apply to librarians. He addressed the remote work scenario of what it takes to work remotely, pros and cons. It does require a set of skills geared to that type of environment such as working in isolation, understanding the needed technology, and the psychological downfalls of no physical interaction.

Another trend is related to digital transformation and how problem solving becomes different in an enhanced telecommuting experience in which collaborative technology changes knowledge and abilities to communicate effectively. Sixt also foresees a more scalable workforce that creates a flexibility for an institution both financially but also from a talent perspective. He identifies that millennials are more likely to embrace this change.

It is likely that COVID will also speed up the turnover of librarians within the profession due to layoffs, retirement and outdated points of view. It is important that vacant positions are not just automatically filled but reconsidered in terms of the current need for talent. Planning for the future will mean hiring strategically and investing in analyzing what knowledge, skills, and abilities will be needed in a new world free of traditional barriers.

Human resources professional Cory Berkey connects these new talents needed with candidates looking for work. He recommends that organizations develop a candidate persona, which might be predominantly digital-native, in order to match needed skills with available talent. This is not the norm for librarian searches but can be useful in both recruitment activities as well as disbursing other functions as appropriate throughout the organization. Berkey also recommends seeking out passive job seekers who have the skills you want and need.

Research has been done related to recruitment of talent outside of the profession. This occurs when the needed skills are found in subject specialty professions, and candidates may not possess librarian credentials. Thielen and Neeser conducted such research this year and concluded that academic libraries are recruiting outside the traditional LIS pipelines for needed talent, which also can improve diverse and inclusive hiring practices.

Conclusion

The workplace of the future will be different for many reasons and in many ways. Lessons we learned from COVID on how to work and communicate will strengthen as technology makers embrace new ways to make virtual work more efficient. Financial stability could be uncertain for years to come so time and effort applied to finding the right talent will be worth the investment. Traditional human resource processes and expectations might also be different, such as more flexibility needed by both workers and intuitions.

Libraries will not be exempt from this and in some ways could lead the charge to help connect people with new standards of working. Some positions might not change as a direct result of technology but instead still need a focus on what happens within the organization in order to

remain a critical component. Seeking the right talent will be everyone's goal moving forward and finding librarians to be leaders will help promote a more stable society.

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